

## About the authors

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### Ivan Doig

According to his Web site, "Ivan Doig grew up along the rugged rims of the Rocky Mountains in Montana with his father, Charlie, and his grandmother, Bessie Ringer. His life was formed among the sheepherders and characters of small-town saloons and valley ranches as he wandered beside his

restless father." Doig has since "turned his personal experiences into award-winning literary novels and personal histories of the West." Starting with his memoirs, *This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind* (1979), Doig has recounted his family history and the stories of his childhood to great acclaim, becoming a finalist for the National Book Award for *This House of Sky*.



### James Gilchrist Swan

According to Doig, Swan "came west in the California gold rush of 1849, from Boston. Ever after, he spent his life in a kaleidoscopic assortment of livelihoods along the Pacific shore, mostly on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington. From 1859 until 1898[...] Swan kept a day-by-day diary, a truly diligent and sustained record of frontier life."

"These diaries, kept regularly from 1862- 1890, are a treasure chest of information on life in the Pacific Northwest. Swan is especially enlightening about the Indians -- Haidas, Makahs, Nootkans, and others -- because not only did he know many of them, and closely observe their customs, but he liked them," says reviewer James Kaufmann.

## Discussion questions

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- This book is in an unusual form (“a journal of a journal”). How did you react to it?
- Doig wrote *Winter Brothers* over 30 years ago. Given the changes since 1979 in the way people write history and in the topics in which people are interested, speculate on how a 2013 edition of *Winter Brothers* might differ. Would a 2013 author even be interested in Swan’s diaries?
- How familiar were you with Ivan Doig and James Swan before reading *Winter Brothers*? If you did not know much about either man, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the book as an introduction to Swan and Doig? If you were familiar with them, does *Winter Brothers* revise your impression of the two individuals?
- Diaries such as James G. Swan's can *reveal*, but they can also *conceal*. How insightful a diarist is Swan? What does he write about, and what does he fail to write about? (Example: he talks about confronting people who are trying to sell alcohol to the Makahs, but Doig points out a lot of evidence that suggests that Swan had an alcohol problem himself)
- Doig connects his experiences with Swan’s in two ways. Sometimes he connects them with his personal and family life (growing up in Montana, having dinner with his friends, etc.), and sometimes he connects them by actually travelling to places Swan was and sharing his impressions of them. Which were more interesting/illuminating?
- Swan is shown perpetually scrambling for government jobs. Do you think this says a lot about Swan (that he was really not so interested in the work as long as he could pursue his interests) or about the government? Did the government “play a nursemaid role” in settlement of the American frontier?
- The book's diary entry for Swan's eighty-second birthday turns out to have been written by Doig, in literary echo of Swan's voice. How much do the two men merge in the book? In what ways do they turn out to be similar or dissimilar?

- On his Web site, Doig writes that “*Winter Brothers* is not really “about” either James Gilchrist Swan or me, or the both of us, but about the westering experience, by way of our eyes and brains. That is, *Winter Brothers* is about finding a place to invest one's life.” Would you agree with this statement? What did you take away from this book?
- The book has a brief portrait of the settler Lars Ahlstrom, who persevered for decades on his homestead, while Swan gave up his own land claim on the Bone River after a few years, and was constantly bouncing around to different places. What differences of personality would account for this? Which man might have been more typical of the American pioneers of the time?
- Swan and the Makahs frequently traded parts of their respective cultures. For example, Swan created art for the Makahs (influenced by some of the Makah styles) and taught them his language and cultural values in his school; while the Makahs shared with Swan their food, recipes, and legends. Who influenced whom the most in these cultural trades? Who benefitted more?

(Questions adapted in part from

Ivan Doig’s Web site - <http://www.ivandoig.com/winterdp.html>

Professor John Findlay’s discussion points -

<https://depts.washington.edu/history/studying/access/pdf/findlay.pdf>)

## Further reading

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### More by James Gilchrist Swan:

The Northwest Coast : or, three years' residence in Washington Territory / James G. Swan. Seattle : University of Washington Press, 1972. 460 pages. (Washington Papers series). ISBN: 978-0295951904

*Three years' worth of Swan's original diaries, reprinted by the University of Washington. An earlier edition is available online at*

<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015009319727;view=1up;seq=9>

The Indians of Cape Flattery : at the entrance to the Strait of Fuca, Washington Territory / James G. Swan. Washington, D.C. : Smithsonian Institution, 1870. 108 pages. Available online at [http://www.sos.wa.gov/history/publications\\_detail.aspx?p=74](http://www.sos.wa.gov/history/publications_detail.aspx?p=74)

*Swan's masterpiece, detailing his life and observations among the Makahs.*

The Haidah Indians of Queen Charlotte's Islands, British Columbia : with a brief description of their carvings, tattoo designs, etc. / James G. Swan. 1874. 18 pages.

Available online at [http://ia700402.us.archive.org/5/items/cihm\\_23957/cihm\\_23957.pdf](http://ia700402.us.archive.org/5/items/cihm_23957/cihm_23957.pdf)

*A short book by Swan, with several gorgeous examples of Haida art at the end.*

### More by Ivan Doig:

This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind (Non-fiction, 1979)

The Sea Runners (Fiction, 1982)

English Creek (Fiction, 1984)

Dancing at the Rascal Fair (Fiction, 1987)

Ride with Me, Mariah Montana (Fiction, 1990)

Heart Earth (Non-fiction, 1993)

Bucking the Sun (Fiction, 1996)

Mountain Time (Fiction, 1999)

Prairie Nocturne (Fiction, 2003)

The Whistling Season (Fiction, 2006)

The Eleventh Man (Fiction, 2008)

Work Song (Fiction, 2010)

The Bartender's Tale (Fiction, 2012)

Sweet Thunder (Fiction, 2013)